

Carpenter (Mary)

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MISS CARPENTER'S REPORT.

The Prisons of the United States.

Miss Mary Carpenter, the tireless English philanthropist, has recently sent to the Prison Association of New York, addressed to Dr. Elisha Harris, its worthy corresponding secretary, the following statement of the condition and wants of the American prisons. We cannot afford to neglect her plain and candid advice. It will be observed that her criticisms of the prisons of New York are even more severe than those upon the prisons of Pennsylvania or Massachusetts; and that she fortifies her opinions by a terrible array of facts.

In compliance with requests I beg to submit to you the following observations upon Prison Discipline suggested by my recent visit to the United States:

The state has a right, for the protection of society, to deprive of liberty any person, man or woman, who is doing an injury to it by breach of the laws. But, in thus depriving him of his liberty, the state has no right to inflict upon him any unnecessary pain, and is bound to provide for his well-being, physical, intellectual, moral and religious, in every way consistent with the object of his imprisonment, which is the protection of society and the minimizing of crime. This object is inseparably connected with the reformation of the offender and the prevention of his future criminal conduct, which may therefore be regarded as the immediate object of his imprisonment. If the shortness of his sentence of detention renders the first (reformation) impossible, the nature of his imprisonment should at any rate be of such a character, in accordance always with his real welfare, as to warn him from a repetition of his offence. The state, that is to say, the legislature, representing society, is responsible for the true development of this principle, and for the right treatment of all the persons whom it has deprived of liberty. In order to carry out in each state this general principle, which should be at the foundation of all treatment of criminals, the following conditions appear essential:

That a Board of Commissioners, selected by the legislature for their fitness for such a duty, and responsible to it, shall be appointed in every state to superintend and regulate the condition of all places of legal detention, and the treatment of the prisoners. The members of such board shall not be removable, except for due cause. Two of the board shall retire annually in rotation, but shall be eligible to re-election.

That the board shall have power to enforce the adoption, in all places of detention (jails, police stations and reformatories), of the general conditions appointed by the state for such places.

That the board shall have power to appoint the chief officers of all the state institutions, subject to the approval of the Governor and Council of the state; such officers (warden and religious and moral instructors) being irremovable except for misconduct or inability; and that it (the board) must sanction the appointment, by local authorities, of such officers in county jails or reformatories, and all places of legal detention under voluntary management; such officers being irremovable as above.

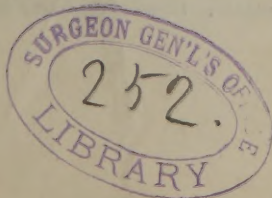
That the board shall appoint inspectors, who shall visit from time to time, at least twice a year, and whenever it may appear desirable, all jails and other places of legal detention, all persons in detention having the power of laying any grievance before them; and that the inspectors shall lay a monthly report before the board. The inspectors of all female jails and institutions to be ladies, who shall recommend to the board for approval all the chief female officials.

The board should present annually a complete report to the legislature.

Until some such boards as this are established, with the powers here briefly specified, there will be no security for the due protection of persons whose liberty has been forfeited by the state from serious injury, physical and moral, arising from bad system, improper treatment and the misconduct or neglect of officials. The following regulations should be made into law in each state:

1. Every prisoner to have a separate sleeping cell, which must be light, airy and well ventilated and warmed, and at least seven feet by twelve in dimensions.

2. Provision to be made for the religious, moral and intellectual instruction of each prisoner reading the Scriptures, and prayer being properly conducted every morning, with



two hours' instruction or intellectual exercise from 6 to 8 every evening, under an efficient schoolmaster.

3. All jail buildings to be constructed so as to carry out the object intended. They should be secure, commodious and healthful, with workshops and suitable chapels and school-rooms; and, if possible, land adjoining and belonging to the premises. There should be provision for daily bodily exercise.

4. No persons to be employed with the prisoners who are not engaged by the warden and under his control. Persons who teach trades to the prisoners should be made regular officers of the prison.

5. No contracts ever to be made for the labor of the prisoners. Contracts made for the work produced must be in accordance with the labor market.

6. All prisons for women to be entirely separate from those for men, and under female officers only.

7. All prisoners, on first entering the prison, to be kept in strictly separate confinement; those in state prisons not less than six months, and those in county jails not less than one month.

The police prisons and police stations should be under the same regulations: great evils arise from the disregard of proper separation of untried prisoners.

Whenever prisons are not properly constructed, it is impossible for officers, however able and devoted to their work, to develop a reformatory system. In ill-constructed prisons the prisoners are exposed to great demoralization. Severity, and even great cruelty, has been exercised on prisoners in the vain attempt to enforce necessary discipline under such conditions, and excellent wardens are unable to carry out their plans or even to exercise a beneficial influence, as they might otherwise do.

The condition of the large cities of this country is evidently most dangerous, with an increasing criminal population and the continual immigration of thousands of persons, many of whom are very liable to fall into crime. The existing jails* are insufficient both in size and number, and the overcrowding of the prisoners necessarily causes great demoralization among them.

I have not visited the county jails of New York and Massachusetts, but the official reports of the condition of their prisons show

that most of them are perfectly unfit for their object. They are, in many cases, absolutely demoralizing. The female prisoners are not properly separated from the males, nor are they under proper supervision. It is impossible to calculate the constant increase to the criminal population arising from this source alone.

Innumerable instances might be found where prisoners convicted of some minor offence, but otherwise having a tolerable character, have been ruined for life by such contact with confirmed villains. I have not been able to learn that there is at present any sufficient authority to inspect these prisons; and it seems that when there is an attempt made to introduce a better system it is always liable to be neutralized by the constant changes of officers which at present occur from political causes, and which are a radical evil.

The bad condition of many of these county prisons also leads to the commitment of many persons to the state prisons whose offences would not require more than a short imprisonment in a well-regulated county prison, with separate confinement, labor and a somewhat severe dietery. An efficient prison board, with authority to enforce proper regulations in every county, would at once remove this evil, of which the county prison in the city of Philadelphia, which I visited, presents a very painful illustration.

There are in this prison four large wards, three of which are for men. There is no arrangement for exercise or for moral or religious improvement. I saw in the cells two or three prisoners together, without anything to prevent them spending the whole day in idleness and injurious conversation. A van of prisoners arrested on the preceding day arrived to add to the evil. Although such prisons are intended for short sentences only, two life-sentenced prisoners were there confined in separate cells. One said that he had worked at shoemaking for seven years in a cell until his eyesight became impaired, and he had been five years alone in this. Should any one be so treated in a Christian country? There were also lunatics in some cells. How is it possible for the good and devoted warden and the truly benevolent directors, who have charge of that prison, to alter the condition of prisoners in a place so constructed, or prevent it from being a school of vice?

The fourth ward for women, which was separated from the others, presented a different aspect. It had formerly been in the same

* Miss Carpenter here employs the word jail or gaol interchangeably for the word prison.

state, with two or three women in a cell together, and two hundred or three hundred always there. A short imprisonment in association with their companions in crime had no terror for them. But a sufficient number of new cells were added; every prisoner had a separate cell, and the well-conducted ones were allowed to work in a cheerful wash-house in the prison garden, under proper supervision. A reformatory influence was at once experienced, and the number of prisoners is now less than one-half of what it formerly was.

What present cost to a city or to a state is too great, if made to diminish crime? Who can calculate the evil arising to a city from ill-constructed jails, necessitating a bad system and day by day increasing the crime in its midst?

I visited the State Penitentiary at Sing Sing, which has been notorious for the barbarities practised in it, and permitted, because not prevented, by the state. I was aware that some years ago a warden of benevolent heart, and acquainted with enlightened principles of prison discipline, had commenced reforms in it, but that these had been suspended by political changes. I had read in the English prints of the renewal of the atrocities. I now learned that the humane warden was again in charge, and I wished to learn the effect of the system he had adopted. In six months only he had succeeded in obtaining a moral influence over the prisoners, whom he treated like men. He had succeeded in making them understand that he desired their welfare, while his duty compelled him to enforce strict discipline. He had won their confidence, and he had obtained their obedience without the employment of any corporal punishment whatever. But the structure and existing regulations of the prison prevented his developing any good reformatory system. The cells were small—three and one-half feet wide—and without a window, solely a grated door, opening into a partially ventilated corridor, so that it was impossible to confine prisoners there during the day in addition to twelve hours at night. Even in some of their small cells there were two convicts. The smallness of the cells compelled the congregation of the large mass of prisoners—eleven hundred and fifty men—in one room at breakfast and dinner—a system which is evidently attended with much danger. There was no worship except on Sunday morning; the remainder of that day, which should be devoted to moral and religious improvement as well as

to religious instruction, was passed by the convicts in the mournful seclusion of their narrow cells.

In this jail, as elsewhere, I heard of the great evils caused by the present contract system. On the morning of my visit a prisoner escaped through the connivance of the employes of the contractor. I understand that a new jail is in contemplation. It will, I trust, be built on a plan which will permit the full development of the methods so successfully adopted in the Irish convict system. I need not enter into the principles of that system, having fully explained them in my work, "Our Convicts," and in the smaller book entitled "The Crofton System."

A close study of the East Pennsylvania Prison inspires me with admiration of the benevolent intentions of those who constructed it, and of those who are now devoting much time and thought to the management of it. But it failed to convince me of the soundness of the principles on which it is built and conducted.

Through the overcrowding of this jail also, there were two prisoners in many of the cells, and there were two lunatics under confinement in it.

The State Prison at Charlestown, Massachusetts, has not the faults of construction which were so injurious at Sing Sing. The cells are generally light and airy, and the general arrangements good. But through the omission of the first stage, of separate confinement, and the non-introduction of other principles of the Crofton system, there did not appear to be that ground for hope in the reformation of the convicts which might otherwise exist.

In the new prison which is in contemplation, it is to be hoped that arrangements will be made fully to develop the three stages of seclusion, association and comparative liberty by which the Crofton or Irish system is characterized.

Before concluding, I would beg to make a few remarks on Juvenile Reformatories or Refuges. I have carefully visited those in New York and Philadelphia. That at Westborough, in Massachusetts, is, I believe, on the same general plan, namely, large associated institutions, which, being enclosed in walls, must be regarded rather as Juvenile Prisons. The reformatory nature of the institutions has been much impeded by the admission to them of young men and women from sixteen to eighteen years of age, who were likely to exercise a most in-

jurious influence on the younger ones. The general experience of reformatory managers in England would lead me strongly to recommend the adoption of agricultural schools on the family system, without walls, for all children under fourteen years of age. The children now in the institutions being removed into these, the buildings might be adapted to the purpose as juvenile prisons, on the Crofton system, for young persons under twenty, who are now, to their very great injury, associated with adult criminals.

I shall gladly lay before you, sir, the reports of a certified industrial school in Bristol, and a small work of my own on the management of reformatories and industrial schools, which will give you some idea of the nature of our agricultural reformatories. The Connecticut State Reformatory and that in Ohio admirably develop the same principles. * * * *

MARY CARPENTER.

